



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 113th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 159

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, MAY 13, 2013

No. 66

Senate

The Senate met at 2 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Lord, You have been our Nation's defense and we look to You for shelter and refuge. You have spoken in Your holiness and we rejoice at Your words that provide light in darkness.

Bless our Senators. May they seek to serve and honor You. May their words and deeds reflect an earnest desire for justice and righteousness in our Nation and world. Crown their years with Your goodness as they trust You to do what is best for all.

We pray in Your holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we are not in a quorum call?

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. We are not.

Mr. REID. I apologize to the Chair for being a little tardy. I try not to be, especially when the President pro tempore is presiding.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following leader remarks, the Senate will be in a period of morning business and Senators during that period of time will be allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The filing deadline for all first-degree amendments to S. 601, the Water Resources Development Act, is 4 p.m. today.

I had a conversation with Senator VITTER on Friday and Senator BOXER today, and I think we are very close to a universal agreement on that legislation to wrap it up as early as tomorrow. I hope that, in fact, is true.

As previously announced, there will be no rollcall votes today. The first vote of the week will be on cloture at noon tomorrow unless we work out an agreement.

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE IRREGULARITIES

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I have been following very closely reports on irregularities in the Internal Revenue Service's scrutiny of applications for non-profit status. These allegations, of course, are very troubling, and I intend to take a close look at the inspector general's report when it is released.

Concerns such as these are why we have inspectors general. They are tasked with finding and preventing waste, fraud, and abuse, identifying breaches of law and protocol, and promoting efficiency in government. Our inspectors general have an excellent record of responsibility, and specifically Russell George, the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration, has an exceptionally strong reputation as a watchdog at the IRS. Of course, watching the IRS is also watching the IRS for the American people. I am confident he is examining this issue and doing it very well, as he has done in the past. I look forward to his report.

The alleged actions of IRS employees in the Cincinnati field office would be a terrible breach of the public's trust. Whether they are investigating conservative groups or liberal groups, they should not be involved. Targeting any group based on its political status is

completely inappropriate. We need to get to the bottom of what happened, and the inspector general will get to the bottom of this. In the meantime no one should jump to conclusions, but we should all rest assured as soon as we have the inspector general's report the Senate will quickly take appropriate action.

I have spoken today to the senior Senator from Montana, the chairman of the Finance Committee, MAX BAUCUS, and he is looking into this matter in his role as chairman of the Finance Committee. If the inspector general's report indicates further investigation is needed, I have full confidence in the ability of Senator BAUCUS and the Finance Committee to get to the bottom of this matter and recommend appropriate action.

THE BUDGET

Mr. REID. Mr. President, as indicated in this chart, 51 days ago the Senate passed its budget. It has now been 51 days. So why are Republicans standing in the way? A picture is worth a thousand words, and that is the picture.

Common sense and more than two centuries of history dictate the next step would be to go to conference and try to find common ground between our budget and the budget passed by the House of Representatives. The conference committee is one of the oldest traditions of the entire American Government. In fact, during the first session of Congress—No. 1—on April 7, 1789, the day after a quorum had been secured and the first meeting of Congress was held, the Senate charged a committee with setting out the rules for such conferences. During that first Congress, the two Houses convened many times on conference committees to consider many different issues they disagreed on, including differences of opinion over amendments to the Constitution, differences of opinion over

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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legislating as to what the courts should do, and looking at bills that created a post office and the Treasury Department. All those were bills, one passed by the House and one passed by the Senate, and they got together to work out the differences.

In this esteemed tradition, Democrats now wish to resolve our differences over the budget in a conference committee subject to the disinfected of public scrutiny, instead of behind closed doors, as we have done for more than two centuries. A number of Republican Senators have joined Democrats in calling for such a conference. It has now been 51 days since the Senate passed its budget. Even Republicans are asking why can't we go to conference?

This is what the senior Senator from Arizona, a Republican, said last week:

I'm very much in favor of it, and I think we ought to do it right away. . . . After 4 years of complaining about Harry Reid's failure to bring up a budget and then we do one and block conference . . . is incomprehensible.

That was a quote from JOHN MCCAIN.

After 3 years of Republican yearning for such regular order, Democrats assumed every Republican Senator would be enthusiastic to go to conference. But although a few Republicans, such as Senator MCCAIN, have called for a conference committee, Republican leaders have refused for weeks to name conferees, flouting more than 200 years of tradition.

Republican leaders have also refused to explain why they won't go to conference. But the longer the Republicans delay, the more transparent this partisan political tactic is becoming. It is transparent they oppose transparency. They do not want openness in government.

Republicans continue to put off a fiscal compromise until our backs are up against yet another manufactured crisis—a catastrophic default on the financial obligations we have as a country. Republicans hope to use the threat of default as a bargaining chip to extract concessions for tax breaks for the wealthy, extract concessions for drastic cuts to Medicare, extract concessions for more Draconian cuts to programs that keep the elderly, the sick, the disabled, and the most vulnerable Americans from slipping further into poverty.

Even though Republicans caused themselves and the country immense political harm by pursuing this wrong-headed strategy last summer, they are at it again, and this time Republicans aren't even hiding their desire to cause a first-of-its-kind default on our Nation's financial obligations.

Last week, the House of Representatives passed a bill called the "Full Faith and Credit Act." If there were ever an Orwellian name, this is it. In their lexicon, up is down, down is up; east is west, north is south. A bill called the Full Faith and Credit Act? Come on.

This legislation ranks the Nation's debts in order of priority—their priority, a Republican-dominated, tea party-driven House of Representatives. Listen to this. Here is what the legislation says:

In the event of a Republican-forced default, the Nation would stop payments to Medicare, veterans, active-duty military servicemembers, national security personnel, and you name it—everything except paying the debt to China.

In addition to threatening the full faith and credit of the United States, this legislation would cost American jobs, hurt businesses, and tank the economy. And it wouldn't prevent default. If an American family has a mortgage payment, a car payment, and credit card payment, but pays only three of those bills, the family is still in default. The Federal Government lives by the same rules. If we pay China but default on obligations to our veterans, we are still in default. If we pay China but not our Border Patrol, not our FBI, not our law enforcement officers, including drug enforcement, we are in default. If we pay China but not our troops overseas, we are in default.

The Republican approach to default is totally irresponsible. The Republicans know this risky measure is a nonstarter in the Senate. Even if it could pass the Senate—which it won't—President Obama would veto it.

Americans are tired of these protracted fights over the budget caused by the tea party-driven Republicans in Congress. It is through compromise, not through hostage taking or political blackmail, that we can set the Nation on the road to fiscal responsibility. That compromise begins by going to conference on the budget. Americans agree the path to economic prosperity runs through the regular order of this legislative body—a process that honors more than two centuries of work.

Finally, I had hoped we would have an opportunity for the Republican leader to explain why he objects to going to conference on the budget. We informed the Republican side we would ask this consent today, tomorrow, the next day, and every day. Let us hope we don't get to day 62, 63, 64, 65, 75, but the way they are going, I guess they are never going to go to conference.

We informed the Republican side we would ask consent today and every day we are in session. While the Republican cloakroom informed us there was an objection, no Republican was available to explain that objection in person. I did this last week, and again they had no one here. I did the same thing I am going to do here. I am asking for consent, but I will withdraw my request out of respect for the long tradition of comity. This is not comedy but comity.

It is outrageous, first of all, that they block this and then don't have the courage for somebody to stand and object. It speaks volumes that no Republican Senator was available or willing to explain the bizarre objection to a

perfectly reasonable request to go to conference and work out the differences. The only explanation we have had so far came from the junior Senator from Texas where he said: We will go to conference, but you have to agree to what we want before we go to conference. How is that for a deal?

The junior Senator from Texas was not available today, and no other Republican Senator appears willing to stand and explain why Senate Republicans are now standing in the way of a budget. So I will ask this and then I will withdraw it.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H. CON. RES. 25

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 33, H. Con. Res. 25; that the amendment which is at the desk, the text of S. Con. Res. 8, the budget resolution passed by the Senate, be inserted in lieu thereof; that H. Con. Res. 25, as amended, be agreed to; the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that the Senate insist on its amendment, request a conference with the House on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses and the Chair be authorized to appoint conferees on the part of the Senate, all with no intervening action or debate.

I would elaborate. This is a process that started being developed in the first Congress that was ever held in this country—1789. My Republican colleagues for years complained about not following regular order. They said we didn't have a budget. We didn't need one, but they said we didn't have one. We didn't do one by resolution, we did one by passing a law. But regardless of that, they came and talked about that.

This is out of line. It is ridiculous. It is unfair to the American people, but it is very obvious what is going on.

I withdraw my request, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MURPHY). The request is withdrawn.

SANDY HOOK

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the Presiding Officer is from the State of Connecticut, and I want the record spread with how much I admire what he and Senator BLUMENTHAL have done in not letting the American people forget about Sandy Hook—not forget about those little tiny boys and girls.

My little grandchildren do not live here. I have three grandchildren, but they are teenagers. My little grandchildren are in Nevada, so I don't have a chance to see them. But I was in church yesterday and saw all these little kids, little beautiful children. To think these little boys and girls, just like the ones I saw yesterday, would be gunned down—shot multiple times, most of them; teachers trying to save these little children just cut down with an automatic weapon.

I admire the two Senators from Connecticut. They are not going to let this fade from our minds. Keep in mind, I